

## (Extra)ordinary Life

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## **(Extra)ordinary Life: The Rhetoric of Representing the Socialist Everyday After Unification**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates the politics of representing everyday life (*Alltag*) in the German Democratic Republic in state-mandated museums and memorials in the contemporary Federal Republic. Through an analysis of advertising material, exhibits, and visitor surveys, it considers how managers of “auratic” sites have responded to the challenge posed by interpretations of the East German state that resist the focus on repression, as well as the impact of this response on different visitor groups. The discussion focuses on two established sites—Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen and Forschungs- und Gedenkstätte Normannenstraße—as well as the exhibition in the Tränenpalast in Berlin, opened in September 2011. It argues that state-supported sites frequently seek to contain memories of *Alltag* by reinterpreting the term to mean the extraordinary experiences of ordinary people. Nonetheless, overly didactic interpretations that leave little space for individual meaning-making risk disinheriting those whose memories are based on social and economic security, rather than state violence. The article argues that there is a tension in these museums and memorials between a desire to present a singular view of the East German state as the second German dictatorship and the recognition that the “active visitor” brings his or her own experiences, interests and memories to public history sites.

### **Keywords**

politics of memory; everyday life; German Democratic Republic (GDR); museums; memorials; Hohenschönhausen; Tränenpalast; Normannenstraße.

In 2005 a Commission of Experts, headed by the historian Martin Sabrow, was charged with finding ways of coordinating and networking the disparate institutions dealing with the German Democratic Republic (GDR) past. One of the most controversial aspects of the Commission’s final report in 2006 was the suggestion that too much emphasis had thus far been placed on the history of repression and division.

The Commission argued that this had been at the expense of “resistance and conformity, ideology and single-party rule, as well as the everyday [Alltag] in the dictatorship.”<sup>1</sup> It was principally the last part of this assertion that caused allergic reactions on the part of a number individuals and groups involved in the management of sites representing the history of state violence. Hubertus Knabe, director of the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen prison memorial, asserted that the Commission’s recommendations would amount to “state-mandated *Ostalgie*.”<sup>2</sup> The Bürgerbüro Berlin, headed by Ehrhart Neubert, described the suggestion as reminiscent of “pseudoscientific attempts to represent everyday life in the GDR without the daily repression, social lack, fears and oustings.”<sup>3</sup> These statements seem in many ways an oversimplification of the Commission’s position, which in fact argued that everyday life in the dictatorship needed to be included not as a concession to *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for East Germany) or to the already existing museums of everyday life, but in order to adequately encompass the self-perception of former GDR citizens and their children and avoid leaving memories of the everyday to, in its terms, the “uncritical collections” of GDR material culture.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, the most recent edition of the Federal Memorial Concept, published in 2008 and drawing on the Commission’s recommendations, can be seen as “something of a compromise” in this regard.<sup>5</sup> The Concept considers that everyday life in the GDR should be included in state-mandated public history, “in order to counteract a distortion and trivialization of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) dictatorship and all forms of ‘*Ostalgie*,’” but that it should be made clear that “the people in the GDR were subject to an all-encompassing state control and exposed to a massive pressure to conform.”<sup>6</sup> From different perspectives, and with different emphases, both the Commission’s report and the response of the Federal government argue that any

(however limited) representation of the GDR everyday in state-supported museums and memorials should not be a reflection of the positive memories of social and economic security, but a counter to the perceived dominance of such images in popular discourse. While both report and Memorial Concept may indicate a change in approach, they thus agree that the principal function of memorials and museums is a pedagogical one—that is, that public history is part of political education. This attitude is not peculiar to Germany. In his analysis of global efforts to commemorate past human rights abuses, Paul Williams notes an “increasing desire to add both a moral framework to the narration of terrible historical events and more in-depth contextual explanations to commemorative acts.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, education is seen as one of the key functions of memorials and “memorial museums”<sup>8</sup> in processes of coming to terms with past human rights abuses across the world.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, this article considers if there is a particular form of didacticism being practiced in reference to the GDR dictatorship and, if so, what impact this might have on individual and collective memories of the East German state.

In this context, I ask how managers of public history sites have responded to the shift in political discourse with regard to the position of the everyday in state-mandated representations. Have they, and how have they, incorporated the concept of *Alltag* into their exhibitions? A number of scholars have considered the representation of everyday life in museums of material culture, which might seem the natural home of *Alltag*.<sup>10</sup> In his article in this issue, Jonathan Bach considers such museums as representative of an early phase in the ongoing process of incorporating the everyday into the public history of the GDR. In contrast, this article considers a selection of museums and memorials that represent state repression and are located on “auratic” sites, that is, places where that repression actually took place. It argues that at these

“memorial museums,” the term *Alltag*, if it is present at all, is used in a very specific way, which perhaps responds to the Federal Memorial Concept, but which does not necessarily reflect popular understandings of the term as the everyday “ordinary” existence of East Germans. These sites do not focus on material culture, but inflect the term *Alltag* to mean how “ordinary” or “everyday” people experienced extraordinary state control. In this respect, we can see a tension between the rhetoric of inclusivity and the politics and practice of museums and memorials that do not fully reflect this discourse and which may result in the continued exclusion of particular sectors of the population.

### **Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen**

The first exhibition to be considered here is devoted very clearly to the history of oppression in the GDR: Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen, situated in the former Stasi remand prison in Berlin. Currently, the prison itself can only be visited by guided tour, usually led by a former political prisoner, in which the visitor can view cells and interrogation rooms reconstructed to appear as they would have done at their time of use. A large permanent exhibition was opened in October 2013, combining a historical narrative about the GDR and the Stasi with eyewitness accounts of detention and multimedia displays. The focus here is clearly not on *Alltag*; nonetheless, in secondary materials, such as the website and activity reports, the memorial sets itself explicitly in direct opposition to communicative memories that seemingly elide the dictatorial nature of the regime, and which the director, Hubertus Knabe, dismisses as “hearsay” (*Hörensagen*).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the history of the Stasi is not presented as only part of a complex and multifaceted society. The five thematic sections in the main

room of the new exhibition, for example, combine history of the prison with the history of the GDR. Thus under “Imprisonment” the visitor is informed that “the feeling of being walled-in becomes a source of trauma for many East Germans.” Under “Surveillance,” control of the detainees in Hohenschönhausen is set alongside the Stasi’s efforts to gather information on other GDR citizens. “Self-assertion” is shown to include the ways in which detainees subverted the rules of the prison—for example, by conducting secret conversations with other prisoners—as well as opposition to the SED outside of the prison walls. In this way, the exhibition suggests that Hohenschönhausen might be viewed as a microcosm of life in the GDR in its entirety.

In consideration of the location of this site, this emphasis on repression is perhaps unsurprising. The presentation of state violence under dictatorial regimes naturally focuses on those who suffered under these regimes, and it is politically important that they do so. Indeed, the Federal Memorial Concept did not advocate that *Alltag* should be included in every representation of the GDR. Nonetheless, in its framing, Hohenschönhausen explicitly negates positive memories.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the site runs the risk that its particular presentation of cultural heritage will alienate those whose personal memories do not mesh with this interpretation, as it permits little space for alternative views or perspectives. In this context, Richard Sharpley argues:

... for any event, for any “past,” recent or distant, there is no single story or interpretation, but new or alternative interpretations ... there are frequently multiple stakeholders in the heritage of past events ... Therefore, the particular interpretation of the past may create an “inheritance” for one group of stakeholders, the inevitable outcome of which is the “disinheritance” of other stakeholders.<sup>13</sup>

In this respect, the narrowing of the past seen at Hohenschönhausen risks distancing and “disinheriting” much of the audience it seeks to address—the perpetrators, fellow-

travellers, and ordinary citizens of the GDR—if it is not able to reflect the ambivalence and complexity inherent to its subject matter.

Although further qualitative investigation would be required to make any definitive statements in this regard, the visitor research carried out by the Hohenschönhausen memorial points toward a worrying trend. The fourth, fifth and sixth activity reports of the memorial offer an analysis of the origins of visitor groups according to their home state, and rank the states according to the number of visits per head of the population. In 2012, all five eastern German states stood at the bottom of the table.<sup>14</sup> As the memorial only records these statistics for registered tour groups (i.e., not individual visitors), and as these come predominantly from schools and colleges, this indicates that eastern German educators are proportionally less willing to use the memorial as part of political or historical education. It is important to note that the number of visitors from the eastern states has not fallen significantly in absolute terms, but only as a percentage in the context of an ever-rising overall number of visitors.<sup>15</sup> This does suggest, however, that the memorial is increasingly viewed as an appropriate educational resource by western German school and college teachers, indicating a gap in the expectations and responses of these different stakeholders.

In 2006, the Hohenschönhausen memorial conducted a more in-depth piece of visitor research, which did include individual visitors and qualitative responses. Visitors were asked to respond freely to five questions: What did you particularly like? What did you not like? What was uninteresting? What was missing? What was superfluous? They were then required to score the tour of the memorial on a scale from “unsatisfactory” to “very good” and provide statistical information about their origins and age.<sup>16</sup> Ninety-two percent found the tour “very good” or “good,” only five percent found it “satisfactory” to “lacking,” and only two percent considered the tour

to be “unsatisfactory.” Nonetheless, some of the qualitative comments suggest that the narrative of the memorial is indeed experienced as disinheritance for certain visitor groups. The report notes:

Many statements [in the responses] can, however, be recognized as sensibilities resulting from certain GDR biographies, for example, demands not to make the GDR seem so bad or when the “Cold War” is held responsible for human rights abuses at the hands of the State Security Service.<sup>17</sup>

The dismissive tone of this statement suggests that, although the memorial recognizes that they are not reaching these individuals with “certain GDR biographies,” they are not, in fact, concerned about providing for this particular stakeholder group.<sup>18</sup> A memorial dedicated to the victims of state violence cannot, of course, be expected to present a nostalgic image of the state in which this violence occurred; however, permitting a greater plurality of narratives and providing a greater complexity in the contextualization might allow the site to reach new visitor groups for whom it would offer new perspectives on personal or familial histories. I am not suggesting that everyday life in the sense of the material culture of the Ampelmann or Trabant should find representation at this site of political persecution; rather that the history of imprisonment by the Stasi be located within the complex history of both the East German state and post 1945 Europe.

### **The Tränenpalast**

In this respect, analysis of the reception of Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen supports the findings of the Sabrow Commission that a more nuanced representation of the GDR is needed—even at sites focusing on repression—in order to adequately encompass the self-perception of former GDR citizens and their children.<sup>19</sup> What about exhibitions opened since the Federal Memorial Concept of 2008? In September 2011,



the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland opened a new exhibition at the former border crossing and processing center on Friedrichstraße, known colloquially as the Tränenpalast.<sup>20</sup> The title of the exhibition—“Border Experiences: *Everyday Life* in Divided Germany” (GrenzErfahrungen: *Alltag* der deutschen Teilung, author’s emphasis)—is, in itself, indicative of a particular understanding of the role of *Alltag* in representations of the GDR. Rather than being presented as an exceptional symbol of the division of Europe and state socialist repression, the use of the word *Alltag* suggests that the border between the two Germanies came to be part of everyday life. Indeed, the exhibition was a direct result of the call in the Federal Memorial Concept for a permanent display at this site on the theme of “Border and Division in the *Alltag* of the Germans” (Teilung und Grenze im *Alltag* der Deutschen), also linked explicitly to its directive to embed *Alltag* in the representation of dictatorship.<sup>21</sup> But what could *Alltag* mean in this context?

The pages devoted to the Tränenpalast on the website of the Haus der Geschichte describe the exhibition in the following terms: “The exhibition in the ‘Tränenpalast’ at Friedrichstraße Station illustrates with biographical examples, 570 objects and thirty media stations on 550 square meters the German everyday [*Alltag*] with regard to division and border.”<sup>22</sup> The information pamphlet advertising the exhibition similarly promises “dramatic and everyday real-life stories.”<sup>23</sup> For the fiftieth anniversary of the construction of the Tränenpalast, on 3 July 2012, the museum released a call for eyewitnesses to tell their personal histories, and audiovisual recordings of testimony can be found on the website.<sup>24</sup> This all points towards the centrality of individual experience for this exhibition and for the concept of *Alltag* deployed here. Indeed, much of the display is made up of written or audiovisual accounts by eyewitnesses relating to fleeing the GDR, meetings between East and West Germans, love affairs

and friendships across the Wall, or memories of the peaceful revolution. In the audiovisual displays, the visitor can select which stories s/he would like to hear according to his or her interests. In some cases, the eyewitness narratives are accompanied by objects that relate to their account of the past—for example, suitcases taken on their emigration to the West, items that they were forced to leave behind, travel documents, or photographs. Nonetheless, the witness narratives are not an addition to or explanation of the museum objects, but are central to the visitor experience.

In fact, in many respects, it is these personalized stories that represent the aspect of *Alltag* in the title of the exhibition. These individual accounts of “ordinary” people in the GDR are brought together in what I have described elsewhere as a “mediated remembering community”—a group of individuals who appear to remember together, but whose “community” is in fact constructed in a particular medium and which does not exist outside of that medium.<sup>25</sup> This grouping allows the different narratives to overlap, support, and authenticate each other, and suggests that individual experience is collective shared experience—that is, of the “everyday.” In many ways, a similar method of conveying the “ordinariness” of extraordinary experience is seen in Hohenschönhausen. There, the witness-guides frequently emphasize the normality of their lives before their encounter with the Stasi—they do not construct themselves as heroes or exceptional individuals, but as ordinary victims of extraordinary circumstances. If we understand heritage as media,<sup>26</sup> the narratives of the guides also exist in a mediated remembering community—their voices are brought together by the memorial, and their testimonies overlap, support, and authenticate one another.

Yet, as in Hohenschönhausen, in the Tränenpalast, these eyewitness accounts do not stand alone in the exhibition, but are combined with a broader historical narrative,

which can be seen as part of the contextualization of *Alltag* in the dictatorship. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) is described as “part of the free world” (Teil der freien Welt), the GDR in contrast as “a communist dictatorship” (eine kommunistische Diktatur). An interesting juxtaposition of East and West news reports on key events—the building of the wall, the agreement on travel permits in 1963 (Passierscheinabkommen), and mass emigration—which has the potential to promote individual constructions of meaning through the comparison of opposing ideologies—is nonetheless set alongside an information board that describes the placards and loud speakers along the Wall as a Western “response” to Eastern “propaganda.”

Moreover, the visitor is presented with an overpowering narrative of national unity. The exhibition constructs the Berlin Wall as a shared history and, in particular, emphasizes the continuation of German-German relations on a personal level across the divide: many of the witness narratives or original recordings relate to meetings between East and West Germans, love affairs, and friendships across the Wall, or the division of families. The history of the *Wende* and the fall of the Wall are told from both eastern and western perspectives. In the *Museumsmagazin* of the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte, Hans Walter Hütter states: “The emotions that were expressed here are at the same time deep feelings of national togetherness—in this way the ‘Tränenpalast’ also becomes a place of remembrance of the unity of the nation.”<sup>27</sup> The emphasis on shared pasts can be considered a continuation of the memory politics of the 1990s, in which, as Andrew Beattie observes, national unity was assumed to require a common understanding of history: “easterners and westerners were now supposed to regard the history of the other German state as an integral component of their own history.”<sup>28</sup> One objection to this might be that it subsumes eastern and western German particularity into a pan-German narrative, which may not mesh with

the self-perceptions of either group. Moreover, the individual testimonies about the post *Wende* period focus overwhelmingly on positive stories of West and East coming together, rather than on the many economic, social, and political problems of unification. In this way, the exhibition promotes an affirmative history of East and West Germans joining forces to achieve “Freedom and Unity” (Freiheit und Einheit)—the title of the planned central memorial commemorating the events of 1989—but does not open up space for discussion of the successes and disappointments of unification, which might allow Germans from both sides of the former divide to situate their individual or familial experience in a broader national and political context.

### **Gedenkstätte Normannenstraße**

The final display to be discussed in this article is an exhibition displayed in the former Ministry of State Security headquarters in Berlin, Forschungs- und Gedenkstätte Normannenstraße. In 1990, the Citizens’ Committee Normannenstrasse and civil rights activists who had occupied the headquarters in the turbulence of the *Wende* founded the Association for Anti-Stalinist Action Normannenstrasse (ASTAK) and took over the creation and direction of the facility. Political and, above all, financial uncertainty marked the first decades of the memorial’s existence, particularly in terms of tensions between the grassroots and independent basis of ASTAK and attempts to bring the institution under the auspices of the Federal (Stasi) Files Authority, or BStU.<sup>29</sup> Most recently, in the context of essential renovations to the buildings that constitute the site and following the Sabrow Commission of 2006, the federal government aimed to convert the complex into a national memorial and give the BStU

a leading role in the creation of a new permanent exhibition, thereby significantly reducing the influence of the former citizens' rights activists. Resistance from ASTAK was followed by the agreement of a compromise and, between January 2012 and October 2014, the newly opened House 1 displayed exhibitions of both organizations, which were quite distinct from one another in form.<sup>30</sup> The site was temporarily closed again in October 2014 and in January 2015 a new joint permanent exhibition was opened at the site. In this way, Normannenstraße is representative of the complex funding environment in the Federal Republic. The site is referenced in the Federal Memorial Concept as a place of national importance and receives state financial support for its activities. Nonetheless, the political capital of ASTAK—in the words of the Memorial Concept, “the significance of the civil rights initiatives and victim organizations for the peaceful revolution”<sup>31</sup>—means that its members retain considerable power to influence decision-making. It is part of ASTAK's exhibition on ‘Ideology and Tradition’, as displayed on the first floor of the site in 2012 and 2013, that is of interest here.

The exhibition documents the history of the GDR, with a particular emphasis on ideology and its place in everyday life. It is divided into sections based on life stages—Kindergarten, Pioneers, Free German Youth, National People's Army—and includes objects, uniforms, flags, wall hangings, and books. This is clearly an exhibition of everyday life in the context of dictatorship—the material culture on display relates directly to the rigid ideological framing of authoritarian rule.<sup>32</sup> Important in the present context, however, is the way in which this ideology itself is presented to the visitor. This is, for the most part, not done through a third-person curatorial voice, directing the visitor on how s/he might best understand what s/he is looking at—the explanatory placards accompanying the exhibition are quite minimal

and contain principally (although by no means exclusively) uncommented historical facts, figures, and dates. Instead, the ideology of the state is presented through extracts from the *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* (Small Political Dictionary), an SED-authorized publication produced in the GDR. The dictionary is introduced to the visitor (through an extract from the text itself) as having the aim of deepening “understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory and the scientific policies of the party that are based on it; and thereby to participate increasingly competently in the realization of those policies in the GDR.”<sup>33</sup> It is from this text, “from the horse’s mouth” as it were, that the visitor learns that the SED itself defined the state as a “dictatorship of the working class” in opposition to the “exploitative states” of history, that “the socialist state does not know checks and balances,” the “political commitment” involved in the coming-of-age ceremony (Jugendweihe), or the aims of the party in educating children to be “socialist personalities” through “collective upbringing.”

It is clear that the extracts from the *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* are selected to highlight specific aspects of the GDR that are likely to jar with the attitudes of the visitor socialized in a liberal democracy. Moreover, the specific arrangement of objects in an exhibition can be as influential in visitor interpretation as directive information placards. Nonetheless, the visitor is not presented with a singular authoritative narrative in this display, but with a series of juxtaposed texts, objects and images, including GDR propaganda, which s/he must compare, contrast, and from which s/he must construct meaning. Although the presentation of the GDR is not neutral (if such a thing were indeed even possible),<sup>34</sup> the venue does not shy away from complexity. The visitor may, for example, find quite reasonable several of the “Ten Commandments for the New Socialist Man”—proclaimed by Walter Ulbricht in 1958 and displayed in the exhibition—particularly perhaps the demand “to abolish

exploitation of man by man.” Nevertheless, s/he must negotiate the contradictions between these ideological proclamations and the evidence of their abuse and failure in practice, including at the site in which s/he is standing.

This is seen particularly clearly in the final two rooms of the exhibition. The first bears the title “Between Pretense and Reality” (Zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit) and contains propaganda plaques, GDR newspapers, wall hangings, certificates, and awards. The information board informs the viewer that the SED attempted to enforce a “‘socialist way of life’” in all areas, which found its “expression in ... the continuous efforts to build socialism and increase productivity, participation in political as well as intellectual and cultural life, and ‘honest, scrupulous, socially useful work,’” but that GDR citizens “attempted to ignore these expectations.” This statement is set alongside a flip-book containing posters from the display, “At Home in Socialism: An Exhibition on the Realization of the Social-political Program of the SED.” The posters are propagandistic commentaries on the SED’s building programs, health, education, work and cultural policies, and provisions for pensioners. This is the image of the GDR that the SED would have perhaps liked to fix in memory. In the next room, however, the visitor is presented with displays relating to East German citizens who did not conform, that is, photographs and objects from alternative cultural scenes or opposition movements, Western products valued in the GDR (for example, magazines or Disney products), and Western music. The display of a selection of file notes indicates that these groups were viewed with suspicion by the state and subject to observation by the State Security Service. In this way, the display suggests that GDR citizens did indeed live somewhere between pretense and reality, that is, between the utopian vision of the ruling party and the desire to lead normal lives within (if not beyond) these restrictions. Thus, this approach may come closer to representing the

self-perceptions of those “ordinary” people and their everyday efforts to “[navigate] the rules, procedures and constraints of their circumstances.”<sup>35</sup>

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the ‘Ideology and Tradition’ exhibition at Normannenstraße would appear to represent a form of musealization of the GDR that, without trivializing the experiences of those who suffered physical and psychological violence and the willful destruction of their private lives, is able to reflect the self-perception of many eastern Germans and their families. Moreover, despite the above criticism of an overwhelming pan-German narrative and suggestion of a fully successful unification, I would argue that this is also the case to a certain extent for the display at the Tränenpalast. This is because both exhibitions adopt a grassroots approach to history, which brings together many different voices and perspectives in mediated communities of remembrance, and which might allow the visitor to situate their own memories of national division and dictatorship in a wider political context. In this way the rhetoric of the Sabrow commission and the Federal Memorial Concept is being put into practice in productive ways. Nonetheless, a tension remains between the narrative about the everyday constructed in these documents and displays, and the general understanding of *Alltag* as lived experience and day-to-day life. *Alltag*, understood as the everyday material culture of East Germans, is not incorporated in these sites outside of those objects that relate directly to ideology or political control. As in Hohenschönhausen, the concept of the everyday is still interpreted by and large as the extraordinary experiences of ordinary people, as they encountered the impact of state repression and ideology on their private lives.<sup>36</sup>



In this respect, the pedagogical approach of the Tränenpalast and the Normannenstraße exhibition perhaps reflects what Graham Black identifies as “an ongoing conflict between the construction of meanings that support an authorized collective memory ... and an ambition to act as place of pluralism and inclusion.”<sup>37</sup> The latter is based on an understanding that “in the process of engaging with the collections and associated interpretive material on display, visitors add new content to their existing knowledge and understanding, and construct their own meanings.”<sup>38</sup> In state-mandated musealization of the GDR there appears to be a tension between the desire to offer an authoritative, singular version of the East German state as the second German dictatorship, characterized by repression and most easily understood through models of totalitarianism, and recognition of the “active visitor” as the “new focus, and even writer, of the museum’s fictions.”<sup>39</sup> Consistent with a constructivist understanding of learning, the active visitor is “assumed to bring to the involvement with the texts and objects of consumption his or her own socially defined experiences and interests, which provide both the context of, and the control for, the meanings which emerge.”<sup>40</sup> It is exactly these “socially defined experiences and interests,” however, that are the cause for concern on the part of many involved in the politics of remembering the GDR, from both the center-right and center-left of the political spectrum. Positive—or to cite the Sabrow Commission “uncritical”<sup>41</sup>—memories of everyday life under state socialism are frequently constructed as something that are incompatible with a commitment to the “anti-totalitarian consensus,”<sup>42</sup> and which therefore need to be contained within a singular narrative of dictatorial control. This results in a tension between a narrow interpretation of the GDR and the desire to construct memorial museums as sites of multiple identities.

It remains to be seen if a different approach will be taken in a rapidly changing museal landscape in Germany: notably, for example, in the new joint exhibition in Normannenstraße, opened as the present article was going to press. The new permanent exhibition in the Berlin Kulturbrauerei, focusing on *Alltag* and opened under the management of the Haus der Geschichte in November 2013 also adds further diversity to the representation of the GDR in public history. The display incorporates 800 objects, as well as 200 documents and audio-visual recordings, and includes consumer items and articles from areas of life such as work and school: material culture thus forms an important part of the design.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, an article in the magazine of the Haus der Geschichte reveals that the designers in fact aimed to use similar strategies to those seen in the Tränenpalast to contain popular heritage. The author, Ulrike Zander, asserts that the GDR “did not only consist of the Sandman, Spreewald gherkins and idyllic dacha.” She opposes the “trivialization” of the dictatorship—represented perhaps by these objects of everyday life—with the “reality” that the exhibition hopes to portray.<sup>44</sup>

## **Bio**

Sara Jones is Research Fellow in the Institute for German Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK. Her first monograph *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism: Negotiating Space in the GDR Literary Sphere* was published by Walter de Gruyter in 2011. Her current research analyzes cultural representations of state socialism in Germany and Eastern Europe. She has published articles emerging from this project on memorials and museums, victim discussion forums, autobiographical memories, and documentary film. Her second monograph appeared in Palgrave Macmillan’s Memory Studies series in 2014 under the title: *The Media of Testimony: Remembering the East German Stasi in the Berlin Republic*. In 2011, Sara was principal organizer of an international conference focusing on memories of state socialism from diverse perspectives and disciplines. A special issue of *Central Europe* bringing together a selection of essays to emerge from the event was published in August 2014.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Martin Sabrow et al., “Die ‘Empfehlungen der Expertenkommission zur Schaffung eines Geschichtsverbundes ‘Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur,’” in *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte*, ed. Martin Sabrow et al. (Göttingen, 2007), 21. Unless otherwise stated, translations from German are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Hubertus Knabe, “Die DDR als Light-Version. Staatlich geförderte Ostalgie: Expertenkommission will die SED-Diktatur weniger grau zeichnen,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, 8 May 2006. See also Hubertus Knabe, “Das Aufarbeitungskombinat: Merkwürdige Vorschläge zur Neuorganisation des DDR-Gedenkens,” *Die Welt*, 8 May 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Bürgerbüro e.V. Berlin, “Presseerklärung: Expertenkommission ‘Geschichtsverbund zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur,’” 15 May 2006. Reprinted in Sabrow et al. (see note 1), 225-226.

<sup>4</sup> Sabrow et al. (see note 1), 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> David Clarke with Ute Wölfel, “Remembering the German Democratic Republic in a United Germany,” in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (Basingstoke, 2011), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Deutscher Bundestag (2008) *Fortschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes: Verantwortung wahrnehmen, Aufarbeitung verstärken, Gedenken vertiefen*, 9; available at <http://www.bundestag.de/bundestag/ausschuesse/a22/berichte/Gedenkstaettenkonzeption/index.html>, accessed on 29 April 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford, 2007), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Barsalou and V. Baxter, “The Urge to Remember: The Role of Memorials in Social Reconstruction and Transitional Justice,” *United States Institute of Peace Stabilization and Reconstruction Series*, 5 (2007); Brandon Hamber, Liz Ševčenko, and Ereshnee Naidu, “Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities? The Challenges of Evaluating the Impact of Memorialization in Societies in Transition,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 4 (2010): 397-420.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Silke Arnold-de Simine, “‘The Spirit of an Epoch Is Not Just Reflected in Pictures and Books, but Also in Pots and Frying Pans:’ GDR Museums and Memories of Everyday Life” in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce (Rochester, 2011); Andreas Ludwig, “Representations of the Everyday and the Making of Memory: GDR History and Museums,” in Clarke and Wölfel (see note 5); Irmgard Zündorf, “Vitrine oder Wühltisch? DDR-Alltagsgeschichte im Museum” in *Die Musealisierung der DDR: Wege, Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Darstellung von Zeitgeschichte in stadt- und regionalgeschichtlichen Museen*, ed. Katrin Hammerstein and Jan Scheunemann (Berlin, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Hubertus Knabe, “Vorwort,” in *1. Tätigkeitsbericht*, ed. Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, 7. The same phrase it used in the third activity report, coupled with the assertion that many of those who did experience the GDR have forgotten the “oppressive reality of the GDR” and developed “an increasingly mild view on the past.” See Hubertus Knabe, “Vorwort,” in *3. Tätigkeitsbericht 2005-2006*, ed. Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, 10. For further discussion of the response of the memorial to the perceived threat of Ostalgie and apolitical

communicative memory see Sara Jones, “At Home with the Stasi: *Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen* as Historic House,” in Clarke and Wölfel (see note 5).

<sup>12</sup> For example, in the link “Myths and Facts: Ten Truths about the GDR,” available in 2009-2010 on the home page of the memorial website. The “myths” to be countered included the view that the East German educational and economic systems were better than those of the Federal Republic. See Jones (see note 11), 213.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Sharpley, “Dark Tourism and Political Ideology: Towards a Governance Model” in *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, ed. Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone (Bristol, 2009), 150.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, ed., *4. Tätigkeitsbericht 2007-2008*, 25; Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, ed., *5. Tätigkeitsbericht 2009-2010*, 19; Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, ed., *6. Tätigkeitsbericht 2011-2012*.

<sup>15</sup> See *4. Tätigkeitsbericht* (see note 14), 24; and *5. Tätigkeitsbericht* (see note 14), 18.

<sup>16</sup> See *3. Tätigkeitsbericht* (see note 11), 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60. Previous reports indicate that these comments have been made throughout the history of the foundation. In the *1. Tätigkeitsbericht* (see note 11, 42), for example, the authors note that 98 percent of comments they receive from visitors are positive, but the infrequent criticism is often attributable to “a different kind of political opinion about the GDR past.” See also Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen (ed.), *2. Tätigkeitsbericht 2003-2004*, 54; *3. Tätigkeitsbericht* (see note 11), 53; *4. Tätigkeitsbericht* (see note 14), 20.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion of the reception of Hohenschönhausen by different visitor groups see Sara Jones, *The Media of Testimony: Remembering the East German Stasi in the Berlin Republic* (Basingstoke, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Sabrow et al. (see note 1), 34-35.

<sup>20</sup> Analysis of the exhibition in the Tränenpalast is based on fieldwork conducted in Berlin in August 2012, and February and August 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Deutscher Bundestag (see note 6), 10.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.hdg.de/berlin/traenenpalast-am-bahnhof-friedrichstr/ausstellung/>, accessed 14 September 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Information Pamphlet “GrenzErfahrungen: Alltag der deutschen Teilung.” Produced by Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Collected in Berlin in August 2012.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.hdg.de/berlin/traenenpalast-am-bahnhof-friedrichstr/tagebuch/>, accessed 14 September 2012.

<sup>25</sup> See Sara Jones, “Community and Genre: Autobiographical Rememberings of Stasi Oppression” in *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold (Basingstoke, 2012); Sara Jones, “Catching Fleeting Memories: Victim Forums as Mediated Remembering Communities,” *Memory Studies* 6, no. 4 (2013): 390-403; Sara Jones, “Memory on Film: Testimony and Constructions of Authenticity in Documentaries about the GDR,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2013): 194-210; Jones (see note 18).

<sup>26</sup> See Roger Silverstone, “Heritage as Media: Some Implications for Research, in *Heritage Interpretation, vol.2: The Visitor Experience*, ed. David L. Uzzell (London, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Hans Walter Hütter, “Neue Ausstellung im ‘Tränenpalast’,” *Museumsmagazin* 4 (2011); available at <http://www.museumsmagazin.com/2011/04/titel/grenzerfahrungen-alltag-der-deutschen-teilung/>, accessed 17 September 2012. Hütter also states: “The concept of unity, which was ever present in the consciousness of the Germans in East and West, is presented using examples from personal experiences.”

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Beattie, “Learning from the Germans? History and Memory in German and European Projects of Integration,” *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 4, no. 2 (2007); available at <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/portal/article/view/483/451>, accessed 31 August 2013.

<sup>29</sup> This description of Normannenstraße is based on: Anne Kaminsky, ed., *Orte des Erinnerns: Gedenkzeichen, Gedenkstätten und Museen zur Diktatur in SBZ und DDR*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 2007), 66-68; Frank König, *Die Gestaltung der Vergangenheit: Zeithistorische Orte und Geschichtspolitik im vereinten Deutschland* (Marburg, 2007), 203-50; Steffen Leide, Josef Budek, Barbara Petkus, and Steve Pryce, eds., *Guide to the Exhibition in Building 1 of the former Ministry of State Security of the GDR* (Berlin, n.d.), 5-6; <http://www.stasimuseum.de/>, accessed 8 July 2012; Dirk Verheyen, *United City, Divided Memories? Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin* (Lanham, 2008), 155-62; Carola S. Rudnick, *Die andere Hälfte der Erinnerung: Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichtspolitik nach 1989* (Bielefeld, 2011), 434-530.

<sup>30</sup> See Rudnick (see note 29), 518-524.

<sup>31</sup> Deutscher Bundestag (see note 6), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Analysis of the exhibition is based on fieldwork conducted in Berlin in February and August 2012 and February 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Where available, I have used the translations provided by the memorial.

<sup>34</sup> As Mónica Risnicoff de Gorgas notes, “objectivity does not exist in the exhibition given that each object is displayed as an interpreted object, with emphasis being placed, in some form or other, on certain aspects.” Mónica Risnicoff de Gorgas, “Reality as Illusion, the Historic Houses that Become Museums” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden, 2004), 357.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (London, 2005), 296.

<sup>36</sup> Irmgard Zündorf notes that most of the private museums dedicated to the GDR everyday show exclusively the private consumer world and reflect little, if at all, the interactions with the economic and political developments. See Zündorf (see note 10), 105.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Black, “Museums, Memory and History,” *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 415-427, here 415.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>39</sup> Sharon Macdonald and Roger Silverstone, “Rewriting the Museums’ Fictions: Taxonomies, Stories and Readers” in *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London, 1999), 432.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>41</sup> Sabrow et al.(see note 1), 34-35.

<sup>42</sup> Deutscher Bundestag (see note 6), 1.



<sup>43</sup> See Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, “Alltag in der DDR: Neues Museum in der Kulturbrauerei,” *Museumsmagazin* 4 (2013); available at <http://www.museumsmagazin.com/2013/04/uebersicht/>, accessed 26 January 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Ulrike Zander, “Ausstellungsvorbereitungen in der Berliner Kulturbrauerei,” *Museumsmagazin* 5 (2011); available at <http://www.museumsmagazin.com/2011/05/berlin/alltag-in-der-sed-diktatur>, accessed 17 September 2013.